DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 282 977 CE 046 395

AUTHOR Luke, Robert A.
TITLE Thinking Back--Looking Forward.
PUB DATE 1 Sep 85
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; *Educational History; Educational Philosophy; *Mergers; *National Organizations; Nonprofit Organizations; Organizational Change; Organizational Climate; Organizational Effectiveness; Postsecondary Education; *Professional Associations
IDENTIFIERS *American Association for Adult Education; *National Education Association

ABSTRACT

This paper traces the history of adult education through some 50 years. The study includes the early turn-of-the-century beginnings of adult education efforts, such as immigrant schools. However, it primarily traces the emergence and growth of the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE), the parallel and intertwining history of the Adult Education Department of the National Education Association, and their eventual merger. Also discussed is the National Association for Public Continuing and Adult Education (NAPCAE) and its eventual merger with the Adult Education Association to form the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education. Some insights are offered into the purposes of adult education and its associations, some ideas as to how the organizations can serve their members better, and some hopes for the future. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED282977

Identification Page

Title: THINKING BACK--LOOKING FORWARD
Author: Robert A. Luke
Address: 5603 Creekwood Drive, Sarasota, FL 33583 (813) 377-0964
Type of ms: Perspectives based.

Biographical note: The author has been a part of much of the history of which he writes. In 1946-47 he served as chair of the Community Organization Committee of the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) and from 1948 through 1951 was a member of AAAE's Executive Council. In 1949, he joined the staff of the Division of Adult Education of the National Education Association (NEA) and assumed the duties of assistant executive secretary of the NEA Department of Adult Education. He was a member of the Joint Committee planning for the merger of the AAAE and the Department and participated in the Sarah Lawrence Conference which designed the organizational plan for the Adult Education Association of the USA (AEA).

As a contribution of the NEA to the wider field of adult education, Mr. Luke served as a member of the initial staff of AEA. He was executive director of the National Association for Public Continuing and Adult Education from 1952 to 1969 and named director of the NEA Division of Adult Education in 1962. He retired from the NEA in 1979 and served during most of 1981 as AEA East Coast consultant. Subsequent to the preparation of this paper, he served as chair of the Publications Standing Service Unit of AAACE and as a member of the Board of Directors.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R Luke

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE 044 375

THINKING BACK--LOOKING FORWARD

by

Robert A. Luke

1986 has been designated as the year of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education's (AAACE) Diamond Jubilee Conference. This date marks the 60th Anniversary of the founding of the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE), the generally accepted landmark designating adult education as a unified, organized branch of education (Knowles, 1977, p. 190-192). For many individuals now prominent and active in adult and continuing education, 1926 must seem a long time ago. And it is! The parents of many of our leaders had not yet been born in 1926. For others, myself included, 1926 seems not too much further back in history than 1910 must have seemed for those who recently viewed Halley's Comet a second time.

Thinking Back

My introduction to adult education came in 1936. It was in a class in School Administration at the University of Denver where I was assigned "Adult Education" as a topic for a term paper. To my surprise, as I began looking into the topic I found I already knew more about it than I thought I did. Later I discovered I knew much less about it than I thought.

For the preceding five years, I had been working as a page at the Denver Public Library and had come to know the various staff members who served as Readers' Advisors. Through them, I developed a fascination with an outstanding series of self-enrichment booklets published by the American

Library Association and entitled Reading With a Purpose. A description of the local library's Readers' Advisor service thus constituted the first part of my paper.

Several blocks away from the central library was the Denver Opportunity School founded by Emily Griffith. Some information about this program had to be included in my paper even though, at the time, I did not consider it a bona fide adult education institution; merely a somewhat different kind of school. True, many of its students were above the compulsory school age but the curriculum was restricted to classes in Americanization and Citizenship for the foreign born, elementary and secondary school subjects, and a variety of vocational classes; scarcely a program to be categorized as "continuing" education.

I was then more concerned about the under-educated high school and college graduate than I was with the uneducated. I was not alone in this. Eleven years later, Morse A. Cartwright (1947), executive director of the AAAE, described that Association as, "for more than twenty years furthering education for mature persons." In 1935, L. R. Alderman, Principal Specialist in Adult Education in the U. S. Office of Education is quoted as having observed, apparently to his surprise, that the literacy offerings of the depression-born Works Progress Administration had demonstrated that many of the students enrolled, "could learn, that many of them wanted to learn, and that a large part of our population was in need of the most elementary training" (Adams, 1944). William Learned of the staff of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching wrote that, "the inculcation of ideas in the adult who is not in school is free from ... distractions, and the problem for the community in this respect is greatly simplified" (Learned, 1924, 1924).

There was, of course, a need to "coordinate" the many non-school education offerings of libraries, museums, women's clubs, the "Y's", men's luncheon organizations, community and proprietary sponsored lectures and forums, and other voluntary groups both public and private. This spurred the Adult Education Council movement. In Denver, this service was provided by the Adult Education Council of Denver, headquartered in the public library, and initially funded by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation. A description of the Council and its work (and the Council did disseminate information about the Opportunity School) comprised the third part of my paper.

The single national organization I knew anything about at that time was the American Library Association. It was only when I attended its Mid-winter Conference five or six years later that I first heard of the American Association for Adult Education.

The Dawn of the AAAE

The AAAE was founded by a distinguished group of intellectuals who, highly educated themselves, strongly felt the need to continue their own learning. The first president was James E. Russell, Dean of Teachers College, Columbia University. Dr. Russell served as president for five years. Knowles (1977, p. 199) provides the names of the 19 presidents of AAAE. They include such well-known leaders in the political, literary, and academic world of that time as Newton D. Baker, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Charles A. Beard, Harry Overstreet, and Lyman Bryson.

The founders of AAAE, including its initial guiding genius and patron, Frederick P. Keppel, president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and Morse A. Cartwright, the executive director for 23 years, were men and women

of vision. Their dream was for an ever increasing level of enlightenment of American and world citizenry. All who serve the field today honor them as we endeavor to carry on that part of their aspiration.

But there were other visionaries, of whom Emily Griffith was but one. In 1910, six years before Opportunity School opened its doors, she said, "I want to start a school where anyone can come at any time and learn whatever he wishes" (Bluemel, 1965). Thanks to her efforts, and those of countless others, programs were being established that, a decade before the founding of the AAAE, would dramatically influence the popular understanding of what adult education is all about.

The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 established the Cooperative Extension Services. By 1915 the concept of University Extension was well accepted in this country. Programs of Americanization and Citizenship education greatly increased after 1915. Then, in 1920, the California State Legislature funded a Division of Adult Education as an ongoing part of the state's educational system.

Eventually all of these, and other speciality groups, formed their own national associations. One of them was to play a particularly important part, along with AAAE, as an antecedent of today's AAACE.

The NEA Department of Adult Education

The teachers and administrative personnel of Americanization and Citizenship programs were organized in 1921 under the auspices of the National Education Association (NEA) as the Department of Immigrant Education. In 1924 the name was changed to the Department of Adult Education. In 1945, Leland P. Bradford, formerly chief of training for the U. S. Immigration and

Naturalization Service, was appointed director of the NEA Division of Adult Education Service and, ipso facto, executive secretary of the Department.

It is important to emphasize, particularly as the nomenclature of that time fades into history, that an NEA "Department", of which there were about 30, was an independent, voluntary association. Each one had its own program, constitution, officers, dues, annual meeting and publications. The Departments were housed rent free in the NEA headquarters and offered access to NEA services ranging from mail handling to publications consultation.

Some Departments, Adult Education being one, were supported by an NEA administrative division which had a paid staff whose almost sole duty was to serve the members of the Department. Membership in the NEA by members of the Departments was encouraged but not required. It was the NEA's way of giving support to aspects of public education that appeared to need some subsidization. In this respect, the NEA stood as the major financial sponsor of the Department of Adult Education in much the same way that the Carnegie Corporation for 15 years provided the major financial support for AAAE.

Following the change in name in 1924, the Department had been gradually enlarging the circle of practitioners it endeavored to serve and began to look upon itself as the national organization best equipped to represent workers employed in all areas of adult education. As the Department sought to widen its membership base, the AAAE, following the withdrawal of Carnegie support in 1941 (it continued to be housed in the Carnegie-financed Institute for Adult Education at Columbia University), began to actively seek new members, many of whom already belonged to the Department.

As the membership nets of the two organizations were cast into ever wider and overlapping waters, differences about the philosophy of governance came to the fore. The Department, with a five-member executive committee and 12

regional vice-presidents selected by the membership, was perceived by many as being more responsive to state and local influence than was AAAE. In the AAAE, almost all policy direction was centered in an 18-member Executive Board elected by a largely hand-picked 100 member Executive Council. The Executive Board elected its own officers. This pattern was defended by AAAE loyalists as essential if a high quality of intellectual leadership was to be maintained.

As World War II drew to a close, both Associations gave increased attention to anticipating the educational needs of returning servicemen and women. Areas of overlapping interest became all the more evident.

The sharpness of the conflict became crystal clear to me early in 1943 when I accepted a position as assistant director of the Chicago Adult Education Council. Ralph McCallister, the director, was a member of the Executive Board of AAAE and a staunch advocate for having it remain the sole, non-specialized adult education organization. Until I joined the staff, charged with organizing Office of Civilian Defense discussion programs, the Council's program consisted of an acclaimed piano recital subscription series, an income-producing Speakers' Bureau, and a publication distributed to Chicago high school seniors describing the offerings of colleges and universities in the Chicago area.

One of McCallister's friends, also a member of the AAAE Executive Board, was Paul Sheats. Both men believed in platform presentations as an effective adult education method. Sheats had worked in the John Studebaker inspired, U. S. Office of Education sponsored, American Forum. McCallister would go on to become director of the Chautauqua Institution in Chautauqua, New York. They differed on the role of adult education membership organizations. Paul advocated that local councils and national organizations alike should serve

practitioners. Ralph held to the view that the role should be supplying services to the public.

As educational director of New York City's Town Hall, Sheats was an occasional visitor to Chicago. I was privileged to sit in on several of the McCallister-Sheats discussions and listened to them debate the merits of a proposal of the NEA Department and the AAAE for setting up a joint committee to plan jointly organized programs. At this time Paul was also president of the NEA Department and had played the key role in drafting the proposal. In the spring of 1944, the proposal was rejected by the AAAE Executive Board. Paul Sheats and Ralph McCallister, of course, took opposite sides.

Despite this set back, efforts toward unity continued, including a five-organization joint national conference in Detroit in 1946. By 1949 another joint committee of the Department and AAAE had been formed. Dr. Cartwright, the first, and up to that time the only, executive director of AAAE resigned and was named president. Herbert C. Hunsaker became acting director and the headquarters office moved to Cleveland College, Western Reserve University. By 1949 my orientation to adult education had undergone great change and I felt quite comfortable accepting a position as assistant director of the NEA Division of Adult Education with the assignment of serving as assistant secretary of the Department.

The governance of the Department and AAAE now overlapped to a considerable degree. Five of the Regional vice-presidents of the Department were university related and Lee Bradford was named to the Executive Council of AAAE. Paul Sheats and Cyril Houle, to name but two, simultaneously held membership on the Executive Council of AAAE and the Executive Committee of the Department.

Merger was inevitable. It took place in May 1951 and the Adult Education

Association of the USA came into being at a Founding Assembly in Columbus, Ohio. It represented far more than a merger of organizational structures. It was a merger of long-held, opposing convictions about means and of deeply felt, jointly held aspirations for the future of a great cause.

The AEA and NAPCAE Era

What was put together in 1951 became partially undone one year later. In 1952 the leadership of the public school segment of the field, while remaining an affiliate of AEA, established a new organization, the National Association of Public School Adult Educators. The name was later changed to the National Association for Public Continuing and Adult Education (NAPCAE).

The emergence of a new organization so soon after the spirit of professional unity had been established at the Columbus Founding Assembly came as a surprise to some non-public school adult educators and as a disappointment to others. However, through a process of careful negotiation, the validity of the public school adult educators' cause--that tailor-made services were required to meet their needs--was recognized by the AEA Delegate Assembly and, acting within its constitutional authority, recognized the new group as a "sub-organization".

The new association pledged not to seek members outside its own field. The NAPCAE Board tended to favor holding its annual conference in the same city as AEA although not necessarily on identical dates. A cooperative publication plan was not considered.

The years 1951-1982 saw great change and phenomenal growth in the field. Although I am not familiar with the comparative statistics, I have no doubt that the promotional literature of AEA is correct when it repeatedly points

out that adult and continuing education was the fastest growing segment of education. During this period, the Ford Foundation-sponsored Fund for Adult Education helped enlarge the concept of Liberal Adult Education as a part of the curriculum of all adult and continuing education. The National Training Laboratories, sponsored by the NEA in cooperation with a number of participating universities, opened the study of adults in group learning situations to interdisciplinary research and training.

In the years spanned by the organizational history of AEA and NAPCAE, adult educators developed sophisticated skills in the fine art of legislative relations at the local, state, and national levels. For the first time in history, Congress enacted legislation supporting general adult education "below the college level." At the time of the AEA-NAPCAE merger in 1982, state associations in 47 states and the District of Columbia became affiliated with AAACE. Every state department of education had an administrative unit on adult education as a part of its structure.

The community college movement grew spectacularly and a variety of National Advisory Councils, sponsored by the federal government, were established to focus on the needs and interests of several specialized aspects of adult education. On college campuses, there was an explosion of continuing education programs for professional development and the average age of students enrolled in university degree programs rose dramatically, demonstrating that part-time enrollment was an acceptable way to go. In 1936 only one university offered a degree program in adult education. Today the number is over 100.

Some Reflections

Perhaps the clearest lesson to be drawn from the 60-year history of the adult education movement is that an Association which represents itself as an agent for the entire field must provide meaningful services for all those who are encouraged to pay dues to it--be they practitioners, students, philosophers, or social scientists. AAAE's absence of a practitioner orientation during its days of Carnegie support left it vulnerable when it became necessary to go to the field to broaden its base of financial support. A related observation is that informed guesses by those currently in the power structure as to what the various populations served want and need will not suffice. Hard data is required.

The formation of NAPCAE in 1952 could almost be predicted by two earlier events. In October 1948, the NEA Department of Adult Education conducted an ill-starred conference at Purdue University for local and state directors of public school programs. It was billed as "an important experiment" that would provide "analysis and practice of skills of group leadership and leadership training." (National Conference on Adult Education, 1948, p. 163.) Most of those who attended, however, were in no mood for experimentation and rejected the enforced practice of leadership skills. They were, instead, seeking help on what they saw as such occupationally unique problems as reducing unacceptable variations in the hourly rates of pay for part-time teachers, planning functional programs for returned service men and women, influencing the design of new school buildings to reflect the needs of adult education, and other specialized interests.

The loss of confidence in the Department occasioned by the Purdue conference was not restored in the new organization when AEA began publishing

Adult Leadership in 1952. This periodical was described by AEA's second president Durrie (1953, p. 93), himself a director of a local public school program, as "a training tool for the lay leader who performs adult education functions." This periodical, while filled with highly useful methodologies and articles that are still reprinted today, found equal disfavor with practitioners in other occupational groups who considered themselves "adult educators" and sought a more job-related publication.

Endless speculation is possible as to how the development of the movement might have been different. If the now universally recognized innovations of the group leadership movement (then, often disparagingly, referred to as "group dynamics") had been introduced more gradually or if a serious effort had been made to seek members from additional occupational groups, such as the training directors in government, business, and industry, while continuing to serve a core membership of leaders in university extension, public library, agricultural extension, and the other major centers of adult education that were so well represented in the Founding Assembly, the future might have been significantly altered. It can hardly be doubted, however, that if the planners of that day, of which I must confess to being one, had spent a little more time on market research--and a little less on the force-feeding of innovative concepts that the dues-paying members were not yet prepared to accept as relevant to their jobs--the problems of membership retention that soon came to plague the Association might have been lessened. In 1954 Philip Frandsen, then membership coordinator for AEA, reported to the Executive Committee a complaint still heard today, "We are losing about as many new members through failure to renew as we are gaining in new members."

The inability, first of AEA and now of AAACE, to show a sustained

membership growth is a historical reality that must be examined. At the time of its founding 35 years ago AEA had a membership of 2,160 members. In 1955, with John Holden as chair of the membership committee, the proceeds of a Fund for Adult Education grant to employ the services of a professional direct mail specialist, a membership peak of over 13,000 was reached— a high that could not be sustained once the direct mail campaign was over (Knowles, 1977, p. 223). Today AAACE has but a thousand more members than at the time AEA was founded. What is the explanation?

It could be that something in the neighborhood of 3,500 to 5,000 members is about optimum, the field being structured the way it is, for the kind of membership organization AEA was, and AAACE is. If so, no amount of skillful promotion will make a long-term difference. It may be that time has arrived for a market survey designed to help association leaders re-examine what services, not available from the occupationally orientated groups, adult educators will be willing to support by paying dues to an organization that, for many, may presently be perceived as of secondary or tertiary relevance to them. It may also be time to review alternative organizational patterns and view the Association and its purposes from a different perspective. To take but one example, would the Association be more effective serving organizations than individuals? This, and similar questions, were raised in the early days of AEA (Luke, 1954) and should never be completely overlooked.

Dreams Come True

While it is doubtful the combined membership count of AEA and NAPCAE in 1982 met the expectations of the founders, other dreams live on in today's reality. The format for a democratically governed, national organization

spanning the entire range of adult and continuing education has been firmly established. An intercommunicating network of national organizations with a vested interest in the education of adults was formed and continues to the present time. The group involvement procedures, profusely employed at the Founding Assembly are still featured in many of the American Adult and Continuing Education conference concurrent sessions. The concern for the application of adult education methods to the solution of social problems is regularly renewed at the annual AAACE Social Philosophy Luncheon. Continuing professional development remains the overall focus of AAACE and many of the Association's leaders are influential in the international adult education movement, which also were the goals of the predecessor organizations.

A spectacular legacy of the AEA/NAPCAE era was the evolution of the joint national conference. Opinions within NAPCAE were orginally divided as to whether or not NAPCAE conferences should be held in the same city as the AEA meeting. Four times, intermittently over a 17-year period, they were not. The first five, however, were held in the same city as AEA, although preceding it by several days and, occasionally, headquartered in a different hotel. Gradually, however, the pattern of jointly planned meetings scheduled for the same city, same hotel, same dates, same combined audience emerged. The availability of regularly collected evaluative data at each of the conferences lent support to the eventual unification of purpose and schedule. The resulting American Adult and Continuing Education Conference has no peer in terms of professional excellence and revenue-producing potency.

In retrospect, it is fascinating to contemplate what might have been the result had the same data-based effort been expended on producing a jointly-planned publication program. In this observer's opinion, had that been undertaken, not only both organizations, but the entire field would have been

beneficiaries.

AAACE--Looking Forward

The first few years for AAACE were rough years indeed. Thanks to those members and affiliates who deeply believed in the importance of a strong national organization for all adult education personnel, the reality of the concept was kept alive. Today, AAACE's continued existence appears assured and the officers and staff are boldly planning for the future.

The May 1986 issue of the AAACE Newsletter announced the initation of a year-long strategic planning process. President-elect Mary Williams is chair of the Strategic Planning Committee. Those involved will be encouraged to "dream the dream" before paring dreams down to workable ideas. In the May issue of Lifelong Learning, president Waynne James shared her dreams for the future of the AAACE with her readers and encouraged all members to continue to "strive for what is beyond our grasp."

Not all AAACE members will be able to attend the Jubilee Conference. Not all will be able to serve on the Strategic Planning Committee. But all members can mark this historic time by periodically stepping outside the day-to-day routines and asking the ultimate questions: To what end? What are our own long-range goals? By the year 2001, the three-quarters of a century mark for the organized movement, what changes would we like to have seen take place in the field in which we work? In what directions would we like to see AAACE grow?

By setting goals and long-range aspirations for ourselves, we will be influencing our own activities, those of our colleagues and, inevitably, the program of a responsive professional association sustained by a network of

Program Units; Regional vice-presidents; local, state, and regional affiliates; and a Board of Directors committed to democratic governance.

Summary

Viewed from a historical perspective, dreams do come true. As earlier dreams are realized, new dreams are required to take their place, the historical perspective also clearly reveals that some history does repeat itself. Thinking back from time to time is an essential part of the process of looking forward if the mistakes of the past are to be avoided and the achievements consolidated.

Some lessons from the past: an organization that has the intended purpose of representing the entire field of adult and continuing education must provide meaningful services to all who are invited to join if a steady flow of membership renewals is to be anticipated. What these services should be cannot be based on hunch and guesswork. Repeated data collection is required, plus some trial and error experimentation, itself supported by data collection. In a fast-moving field such as adult and continuing education, long-held assumptions must occasionally be tested, even if but empirically.

Planning for the future of an association endeavoring to represent many different populations requires faith and good will, qualities AAACE members have already demonstrated they possess. It also implies a willingness to seek out the cause of the dreams that failed. Planning for the future is a process in which every member in a democratically organized association can, and must, play a part.

The convergence of the Diamond Jubilee Conference and the unveiling of the Strategic Planning Process provides for all of AAACE's members a ready reminder to spend some time Thinking Back--and Looking Forward.

September 1, 1985

REFERENCES

Adams, J. T. (1944). Frontiers of American Culture. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, p. 286

Bluemel, E. (1965). The Golden Opportunity: The story of Emily Griffith Opportunity School of Denver. Denver, Colo.: Johnson Publishing Co., p.3.

Cartwright, M. A. (1947). Why Adult Education is Important to You and Your Community. Adult Education Journal, 6(1), p. 3.

Durrie, P. H. (1953). From the AEA's President. Adult Education, 3(3), p. 94.

Knowles, M. (1977). A History of the Adult Education Movement in the United States. Huntington, NY: Robert E. Kreiger Publishing Co., p. 10.

Learned, W. S. (1924). The American Public Library and the Diffusion of Knowledge. New York: Harcourt, Brace.

Luke, R. A. (1954). The AEA and the Field of Adult Education. Adult Education, 4(4), p. 129-137.

National Conference on Adult Education. (1948). Adult Education Bulletin, 12(6), p. 163.

wpc/TBLF:1/June 4, 1987